

Position of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Regarding the Program Evaluation Division's Report on Agricultural Research Facilities

The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services believes that the current management structure for the state's agricultural research stations has benefitted farmers and consumers and should be maintained.

- **NCDA&CS has been the backbone and heart of agricultural research partnerships in North Carolina for 70 years.** Our land-grant universities provide the scientific expertise, and we provide the technical know-how for applied research. Our commitment to partnerships has helped agribusiness remain North Carolina's leading industry and the employer of nearly one-fifth of our state's workforce.
- **NCDA&CS provides direct accountability to the people of North Carolina.** The Commissioner of Agriculture is elected by the people to stand up for farmers and set agricultural policy. The department's budget is approved and certified by the legislature. Transferring station management to N.C. State University would reduce accountability. Further, NCSU in the past has stated its intent to sell research stations. The NCDA&CS is committed to looking after ag research and ensuring that it benefits N.C. farmers.
- **Major farm organizations and most state commodity associations have indicated support for the current structure.** The research stations are well-managed. Agricultural leaders in other states recognize North Carolina's outstanding system of research as one of the best in the nation.
- **Eighteen research stations support our diverse agriculture industry.** North Carolina has a wide variety of soils and climates, and the 18 research stations enable research customized for these characteristics. For example, 90 percent of the varieties of blueberries grown in North Carolina were developed at the Horticultural Crops Research Station in Castle Hayne.
- **Research stations are used as staging areas for response and recovery operations.** Stations have assisted in recovery following hurricanes Fran, Isabelle and Ivan. Five stations served as distribution sites to meet farmers' hay needs during the drought of 2007-08. Closing research stations would hurt the state's ability to respond to agricultural disasters.
- **Farmland preservation is a top priority.** The report recommends selling at least seven research stations. Given the fact that the General Assembly last year approved \$120 million in debt-financing to preserve land in North Carolina, it would not be fiscally responsible to sell prime farm and forest land the state already owns.
- **Collaboration and cooperation are best for agriculture.** Strategic planning with our partners at N.C. State University will lead to opportunities for economic efficiencies. But do not confuse cutting ag research and selling valuable resources with efficiency. Efficiency involves getting the most from your existing resources. Cuts mean less research, fewer natural resources, fewer employees, less service.